

Honorable Commissioners
United States Commission on Civil Rights

Commissioners:

We are Asian Americans from many different ethnicities and nationalities, who together request your attention to the systematic inequities experienced by many Minnesotans from communities of color, and particularly we write in solidarity with Black Minnesotans, who are deeply impacted by systems that yield grave criminal justice disparities. According to a July, 2016 Washington Post article, "White people make up roughly 62 percent of the U.S. population but only about 49 percent of those who are killed by police officers. African Americans, however, account for 24 percent of those fatally shot and killed by the police despite being just 13 percent of the U.S. population." Other communities of color and Indigenous Minnesotans experience forms of police misconduct, including Asian American communities.

Minnesota is a wealthy state with a median household income of just over \$60,000 a year and a longstanding reputation for investing in the common good. Minnesota's communities of color and Indigenous communities have a very different experience. According to 2015 data cited by the Minneapolis Star Tribune, Black households have a median income of half of the median state income, at \$30,000 a year. These disparities extend to education outcomes. According to 2015 NPR data, 85% of white students graduate Minnesota public schools on time, while less than 60% of Black and Latino students graduate on time, and a shocking 49% of Indigenous students graduate on time. These disparities also exist in healthcare. The nonpartisan nonprofit Minnesota Community Measures reports 27% of black Minnesotans receive optimal diabetes care, compared with 41% of white Minnesotans.

We write to emphasize the moral urgency of Minnesota's situation, and also with real frustration. We write from personal experience. The economic data suggests Asian Minnesotans have a median income of \$72,000 a year, yet Minnesota's Southeast Asian communities, particularly Hmong Minnesotans, the largest subgroup of Asian Minnesotans, live in poverty below \$12,000 a year. Asian Minnesotans born in Laos experience significant health disparities, including disproportionate rates of untreated Hepatitis B infection. The experience of struggling invisibly in the face of affluence is visceral and real for Asians in Minnesota, and we cannot stay silent.

RADAZNs formed out of an earlier organizing effort, APIs for Black Lives. In December 2015, APIs for Black Lives partnered with the grassroots group Asian American Organizing Project to conduct door knocking with Asian American households on the Northside of Minneapolis. We canvassed Asian American neighborhood residents about the police killing of Jamar Clark and their own experiences with the police. Overwhelmingly, the responses from the door-knocking surveys call for more police transparency and accountability. A few key highlights:

- 1) While a majority of respondents answered that they have not faced police abuse, many of those with this response went on to describe situations involving what could be

characterized as police abuse, such as excessive force or racial profiling, indicating that they did not relate to the term “police abuse.” Instead, most respondents used the term “discrimination” to describe what happened to them.

- 2) Several respondents linked the killing of Jamar Clark to the 2006 killing of Hmong youth Fong Lee, which also occurred on the Northside of Minneapolis.
- 3) Asian American residents predominantly answered that the 4th precinct occupation by Black Lives Matter protesters did not affect them in a negative way, despite media coverage that consistently centered narratives framing the protest as a community nuisance.

This surveying effort tells us that police misconduct in the Asian American community is overlooked and under researched, and suggests that communities of color and Indigenous communities connect our experiences with and struggles against systematic police abuse.

The accusation of a famous immigrant and refuge-seeker Albert Einstein in **1946** reads, “Your ancestors dragged these black people from their homes by force; and in the white man’s quest for wealth and an easy life they have been ruthlessly suppressed and exploited, degraded into slavery. The modern prejudice against Negroes is the result of the desire to maintain this unworthy condition.”

Yet the point of data and this letter is not that we want black communities, other communities of color and indigenous communities, to experience White Minnesota as normal. Many of our Asian communities came to Minnesota and to the United States seeking equitable opportunity. The hope that immigrants bring and the resilience, innovation and persistence that refugees bring are amazing assets wasted and rudely disregarded by majority culture. Minnesota’s communities of color and indigenous communities are vital to our future. Our liberation and our success depends not on charity, but on how we recognize and leverage the assets of the communities of color and indigenous communities we have taken in contempt all around us.

Respectfully,

RADAZNS